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NSC FOR ABRAMS
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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (7/25): DIFFERING VIEWS ON
OBAMA'S WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER PALESTINIAN POINT OF VIEW

Main Stories:

The Israeli decision to establish a new settlement called Maskiot dominates the front pages of all dailies. According to Dr. Sa'eb

Erekat, chief of the Palestinian Negotiations Unit, the Palestinian Authority (PA) made phone calls to the Quartet, the U.S. administration, and the European Union to complain about the establishment of this new settlement and warn about the consequences of Israel's intensifying settlement activities and incursions into the Palestinian Territories. Al Quds also reports that U.N Secretary General Ban Ki Moon expressed concern regarding these developments and reiterated his call on Israel to stop all settlement activities.

Israeli actions in the West Bank and Jerusalem continue to grab front-page headlines in all the dailies. According to the coverage, Israeli forces "invaded" several regions in the West Bank on July 24, including the Beit Ummar, Hussan, and Al- Minya villages near Hebron, where Israeli soldiers reportedly clashed with local residents and inspected houses. The articles in the dailies also mention that a curfew was imposed on Bayt Fajjar village next to Bethlehem on July 24 and that Israeli forces confiscated machines and industrial equipment from Palestinian factories there. Finally, all the dailies report that injuries were suffered by Palestinians in Ni'lin village near Ramallah during a peaceful protest against the separation wall on July 24, but differ on the number of casualties: Al Quds reports that 12 Palestinians were injured, while Al Hayat Al Jadida claims there were 16.

Al Quds notes that Egypt permitted official Hamas member Maryam Farhat to enter Egypt from the Gaza Strip via the Rafah crossing for urgent medical treatment following a heart attack, citing a report by official Hamas member Salah Al- Brodwil. The same article

reports that Hamas asked Egypt on July 24 to keep the Rafah crossing point open to allow the passage of people requiring medical treatment. In related coverage in Al- Quds, there is mention of a letter sent to the U.S. Administration and the State Department by members of the U.S. Congress, the Peace Forum in the Middle East, human rights organizations in Ohio City, and American Jewish activists, asking that Palestinian students from the Gaza Strip be allowed to travel to continue their studies. In the letter, they reportedly also wrote, "we thank the U.S. Consulate General and its staff for their understanding and for their efforts in facilitating the issuance of visas for the Palestinian students from the Gaza Strip who obtained American scholarships, and especially its willingness to send members of the U.S. Consulate to the Hanoun crossing point in the Gaza Strip to interview the students who did not get permits from Israel to enter Jerusalem for an interview." The letter also reportedly urged the American Administration to play an active role in ending the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip.

Coverage in all dailies mentions that presumptive Democratic candidate Barack Obama began a tour in Europe on July 24, reporting that in a speech in Berlin, Obama called on a "new generation" to destroy divisive barriers and confront the planet's challenges. In related coverage, Al- Quds reports that Israeli media held a series of interviews with Obama during his visit to Israel on July 23. Israeli media is said to have concluded from these interviews that Obama does not intend to run away from the Middle East problems, and will on the contrary prioritize them. In a related report in Al- Quds, both Palestinians and Israelis are said to feel that during his visit, Obama told each side of the conflict what it wanted to hear, and that neither side was convinced that its stance is wholeheartedly embraced by Obama.

JERUSALEM 00001349 002 OF 003

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Al Quds reports that the Palestinian Ambassador to Egypt, Nabil Amro, announced during an interview with its correspondent in Cairo that a Palestinian- Egyptian summit will take place on July 27. The Palestinian Authority President will reportedly brief the Egyptian President on the latest developments in the Palestinian Territories and on negotiations with Israel. Al- Ayyam claims that this summit will take place a day earlier, on July 26.

Al- Ayyam and Al- Hayat Al- Jadida report that the EU has pledged 4.7 million euros to the PA so that it can pay the salaries of its employees, according to a statement made by the EU on July 24.

BLOCK QUOTES:

11. Independent Al- Ayyam runs an editorial by Rajab Abu Sirriyyeh entitled, "Barack Obama: the journey in search of the Jewish voice" (7/25): "...Obama's attitude towards the Israeli side...has become clearer and more practical. [His visit to Sderot]...aims to portray Israel as a victim of Palestinian "terrorism." In addition, he refrained from referring to the separation wall or the settlements, thus adopting an imbalanced policy [in favor of Israel] ... he became closer to Israel...and the two candidates for the U.S. presidency do not see anyone except Israel. And by the way, usually those who reach the White House are first committed to the continuity of American policy towards Israel...more than that, they let Israel determine their policies regarding the Middle East according to what is convenient for Israel...If the Palestinians do

not solve their problems with internal unity, and if the Arab countries do not stand by the Palestinians, the coming American Administration will be equally or even more biased towards Israel..."

¶2. A second editorial in the same newspaper by Muhammad Yaghi entitled "Obama learns to sail in the Middle East" (7/25) expresses a different point of view: "...Obama's declarations in Israel and his visit to Sderot, the Wailing Wall, the Holocaust Museum and his meeting with the [Israeli] leader of the opposition party, Benyamin Netanyahu, were dedicated to the Jewish voters and to the Israeli groups who can influence the results of the American elections. In the Middle East...Obama's eyes were focused on the American elections and on his opponent. However, this did not make him lose his balance which his opponent McCain lost when he [McCain] said with indifference, 'let the Palestinians say whatever they like' as if the Arab and Islamic world were worthless."

¶3. Al- Quds runs its daily editorial entitled, "Until when will the
JERUSALEM 00001349 003 OF 003

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Rafah crossing point be closed?" (7/25) "...besieging one and a half million Palestinians in order to punish Hamas is a kind of collective punishment that violates international laws. Saying that opening the Rafah crossing point will empower Hamas is a hypothesis that lacks logic and objectivity. The question that arises in this context: will the closure of the crossing continue as long as Hamas is in control of the Gaza Strip? And what if Hamas' control of the Gaza Strip lasts a long time?...Gazan people...have the right to ask that all the involved parties...especially the Palestinian Authority, the EU, Egypt, and Israel, deal with the question of opening the crossing from the humanitarian point of view, regardless of the political factors, and quickly move to end the unfair siege by opening all the crossings, especially Rafah...to enable the Gazans to move and travel for treatment, and in order to revive the economy and trade. And Hamas has to be willing to re-embrace national unity and constitutional legislation. But opening the crossings is a top priority because it is the most urgent and sensitive Palestinian, Arab and international demand."

Walles